

# Curb-side Service at Kuwait International

by Lt. Rich Green

Our scheduled SSC mission in the Northern Arabian Gulf changed even before we jumped into the helicopter. We were called to do a medevac from a British frigate steaming in company with our own. One of their crew had a kidney problem that required immediate medical attention. It didn't take long to prep ourselves and our SH-60B for the mission.

After completing a hot-pump and crew swap, we sat turning on deck for quite a while, waiting for diplomatic clearance into Kuwait. In the meantime, we coordinated our plan of action with the other ship. We discussed the

Photo-composite by Allan Amen

patient's needs, our approach and pickup, and who would ride to Kuwait.

Two major factors quickly arose during our planning. First, because of the size and weight limitations of their flight deck, we could not land. Second, the sun was quickly setting, and we wanted as much daylight as possible. The plan changed several times as we sat there. It changed again after we lifted, requiring us to land and pick up an extra crewman.

When we did so, the HAC considered replenishing the fuel we had burned during the long wait. However, the refueling team was not manned, and the entire sequence would have been too time-consuming. Daylight was running out.

Perhaps foregoing fuel was a good thing. When I finally made the approach to a hover over the deck, I noted my engine instruments approaching their max continuous limits. Had we been any heavier, I doubt I would have been able to safely hover for the amount of time that we did. Nevertheless, fuel would become an issue later in the flight.

The pickup itself went smoothly. The patient was strapped into a rescue litter for the ride up the hoist, but was seated for the flight. His doctor came along with him. The whole process took two approaches and was completed just as darkness began to spread over the Gulf.

On the flight to Kuwait, we went over our fuel calculations repeatedly. Land was about 70 miles away, and the rescue had used more fuel than we expected. The HAC decided we would return overhead with sufficient fuel, as long as there were no delays at the end of the flight.

After some difficulty raising Kuwait Approach, we finally got switched over to tower. Upon landing, the Kuwaitis told us to taxi to an unoccupied tarmac where we would be met by a medical team. When we stopped, we secured one engine to save gas. There was no one there to greet us. Both crewmen got out to speak to uniformed personnel nearby. It seemed like they were not getting much


information, so we made a call to tower. Just then, something black filled my peripheral vision to the right. The HAC immediately saw the same thing. We both sat stunned to see that a covered pickup truck had just driven under the rotor arc of our turning helo! I'll leave to your imagination what we said next.

One of our aircrewmembers took charge and tried to wave him away. I did the same. The truck was facing the same direction as the helo. It was dark outside, and I couldn't see the tip path of the rotor blades. As he drove off—straight forward!—we pulled back and left on the cyclic and prayed he didn't get whacked. At the last second, he turned away to the right instead of continuing toward the lowest part of the tip path. After a few deep breaths, we calmed ourselves and returned to the mission at hand.

We delivered the patient to our friends in the black truck, started the second engine, then departed. We flew back at max range air-speed, arrived overhead homeplate with plenty of fuel, and landed.

What could we have done differently? We discussed this at length during the long flight back. Fuel was not available at the airport, or else we would have got it. We calculated our fuel and watched it like a hawk. Not much we could have changed there. As for the truck, perhaps we should have assigned one crewman as plane captain while the other made the patient transfer. It is doubtful the driver would have seen him or even heeded him that night, but it would have been a good idea.

Another option would have been to shut down the helo since the truck was parked so close to our helo. But things happened so quickly that our first reaction was to wave him away.

That's LAMPS for you—Learning from A Mighty Precarious Situation. Count on the plan changing when you least expect it. Keep your head on a swivel, especially in a strange place, and always rely on your wits and your training. 

Lt. Green flies SH-60Bs with HSL-42.